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Review of the standards of travel and entitlements for staff members, members of organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations and entities of the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The current report, mandated by General Assembly resolution 60/255, outlines the results of a survey conducted by the secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the existing standards of travel in place throughout the system. It indicates that while in some areas organizations have moved in a similar direction, for example the implementation of lump sum payment for many categories of travel, significant diversity remains within the policies of organization in the travel area.

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I. Introduction

1. As global organizations, entities of the United Nations system require many of their staff members to travel, whether to meetings or conferences, for programme delivery activities or for monitoring and evaluation work. Beyond travel for work, those entities are obliged to transport new staff members and their families to their duty stations (appointment travel), and back after the conclusion of their contracts (separation travel). During their term of service, staff and their family members are entitled to home leave travel and their children to education travel. In certain circumstances, agencies provide other categories of travel, such as medical evacuation and relocation for security purposes.

2. To regulate such travel, each United Nations entity develops policies that guide the standards to be used for different types of travel. While many entities share similar policies, there continue to be inconsistencies across the United Nations system. In 2004, the Joint Inspection Unit studied the range of travel policies in place and its report on the harmonization of the conditions of travel throughout the United Nations system (A/60/78), along with the comments of the Secretary-General and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) thereon (A/60/78/Add.1) were considered by the General Assembly at its sixtieth session. In its resolution 60/255 (sect. IV, para. 2), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to initiate, within the framework of CEB, a review of the standards of travel and entitlements for staff members, members of organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations and organizations of the United Nations system, with a view to adopting a common policy at the United Nations system level.

3. The current report, in response to this request, provides the results of a survey conducted by the secretariat of CEB on the current status of the travel policies and practices in place across the system. The survey, carried out in late 2006, was distributed through the inter-agency travel manager's network to approximately 38 intergovernmental organizations, both within and outside the United Nations system. A total of 17 entities (16 from the United Nations system and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) responded. The survey results are summarized in annex II and provide an updated picture of the variation in travel policies in the two years since the Joint Inspection Unit report.

II. Mission travel accommodation

4. Mission travel is the category used when United Nations staff members travel in their official capacity. As noted in the 2004 Joint Inspection Unit report, many studies over the years have focused on the standard of accommodation provided to staff members while on this type of travel. While consistency of standards prevails within the United Nations Secretariat and most of the funds and programmes, the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations family do not appear to have achieved any significant level of harmonization in this area.

5. The survey first asked entities to report if the class of travel (first, business, or economy) provided to staff members differed depending on grade level and journey duration. With regard to the standards at the grade level, only one responding entity within the United Nations family, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical

Weapons, provides the same accommodation to all staff members at every level. Several organizations (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and World Tourism Organization) explicitly indicated that their executive heads travel in first class. The class of service for officials below executive head, but above the D-2 level, can vary. At FAO, senior officials (those above a D-2 level) receive business class accommodation for flights of any duration, while at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), officials above the D-2 level receive first class on flights longer than seven hours, otherwise they receive business class. UNESCO provides business class for officials above the D-2 level for all flights within Europe and the Mediterranean region, otherwise they also receive first class. One organization, the Universal Postal Union (UPU), offers first class accommodation for the executive head (Director-General), and the Deputy Director-General; however the UPU reports these individuals normally elect to travel in business class.

6. Almost all organizations provide a different class of air accommodation based on the length of the journey, especially at the D-2 level and below (see table 2). The norm for many agencies is largely consistent with the rules for the United Nations Secretariat, funds and programmes, where business class is applied for duty trips of longer than nine hours, with economy class the standard for shorter journeys. However, variations do exist. IAEA uses seven hours as the demarcation between business and economy class. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the World Tourism Organization use 10 hours. UNESCO uses eight hours and has the further provision that for trips between their headquarters locations (Paris) and New York, staff members may use business class. UPU provides economy class for all staff members at the D-2 level and below for journeys of any length, except upon special request and at the approval of the executive head.

7. The application of business class travel based on journey length has been discussed in several forums, including the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), which last considered the issue, along with other aspects of travel policy, in 1997. In its annual report of that year, ICSC notes that most decisions regarding travel policy are best "left to the legislative/governing bodies of the individual organizations to sort out in consultation with their respective executive heads".[1] However, ICSC went on to suggest that "for flights of six or more hours' duration it was reasonable to consider an upgrade from economy to business class".[2] The report notes that during its discussion, the Commission considered the contribution of the United Nations Medical Director, who noted that the medical directors of the entities of the United Nations system supported business class accommodation for journeys of six hours or longer. As can be seen from the results of the Joint Inspection Unit report and this follow-up survey, entities generally do not follow the six-hour ICSC guideline for business class accommodation.

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 30* (A/52/30), para. 275 (c).

[2] Ibid., para. 275 (d) (i).

8. Beyond the class of travel, the survey asked entities to indicate whether or not their policies provide for stopovers and rest on arrival. As noted in annex II, most entities allow for both stopovers and rest on arrival.

III. Non-mission travel

9. Other than for travel on missions, entities have policies that support a wide range of travel categories. The survey examined five of these; appointment, separation, home leave, education and change of duty station. Entities were asked to indicate if the policies for these categories differed from those of mission travel and, if so, to provide details on how they differed.

10. The survey found that for appointment travel, entities generally apply the same rules as for mission travel but with some variation, mostly by offering the traveller a lump sum payment instead of ticket. For example, at FAO the traveller has the choice between a ticket based on the mission travel rules or a lump sum payment of 80 per cent of the full applicable airfare; business class if over nine hours; or full economy class if less than nine hours. At UNESCO, the traveller can also choose between a ticket and a lump sum payment. However, this agency does not base the ticket on the mission travel rules. Instead, UNESCO offers either an economy class ticket for any journey length or a lump sum payment of 60 per cent of the full economy airfare. Not all entities offer a lump sum option; for example, ILO does not offer this option to staff on appointment or separation travel.

11. For separation travel, almost all entities responding to the survey apply the same rules as for appointment travel. The one exception was UPU, where lump sum payment is available to the traveller for separation, but not for travel on appointment.

12. Similar variations in policies across the system exist for three other categories of travel — home leave, education and change of duty station. At FAO, for example, the rules for home leave and change of duty station travel are the same as for appointment travel, as noted above, but for education travel, business class is not available. ILO offers a lump sum payment for education and home leave travel; otherwise, a traveller can choose the option of a ticket, which is based on the mission travel rules (business class over seven hours, otherwise economy class). At IAEA, the traveller can choose either the option of a ticket, based on the mission travel rules, or a lump sum payment, but the payment for home leave travel is 75 per cent of the full economy fare, while for education or change of duty station travel the payment is 65 per cent of the full economy fare. In general, more entities offer a lump sum payment for these categories of travel than for appointment and separation. According to the survey results, neither IFAD nor the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) offer a lump sum payment option for appointment and separation travel, but this option is available for home leave and education travel.

13. While not exploring other travel categories in depth, the survey requested entities to indicate if they had policies that recognize an additional seven categories: reverse education (in which a parent visits a child at school, as opposed to education travel, which brings the child to and from school); medical evacuation; security evacuation; rest and recuperation; breastfeeding mothers; single parents; and domestic partners. As can be seen in annex II, only three responding entities, the

United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office at Vienna, recognized all seven of these. Of these seven categories, medical and security evacuation were recognized by the most entities, with only two entities, UPU and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, not recognizing these as separate travel categories. Single parents was a category recognized by the fewest entities, with breastfeeding mothers, single parents and domestic partners recognized by five organizations each.

IV. Representatives of Member States

14. Beyond travel for staff members, the CEB survey also endeavoured to assess the diversity of rules for travel of non-staff members and specifically asked if entities provided travel benefits for representatives of Member States and, if so, to describe the standard of accommodation. Nine of the 16 of the responding entities indicated that representatives of Member States received travel benefits of some kind. For some entities, the standard is very detailed. For example, UNDP reports that all representatives receive business class for travel over nine hours and economy class for trips of under nine hours. UNESCO reports that the Heads of the Executive Board and the General Conference always travel in first class and members of the Executive Board always travel in business class, while UNHCR and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization both indicate that the rules for representatives of Member States follow the same rules as staff members.

15. Finally, to judge the complexity that United Nations entities may face when trying to alter travel policies, the survey requested entities to indicate the travel policy decision-making body and were asked whether decisions of this nature were made by the governing body, the executive head or both. Only three entities, two from the United Nations Secretariat (the United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Office at Nairobi) and the United Nations Children's Fund, indicated that these decisions come from the governing body. Six entities indicated that the executive head could set these policies, while a further six indicated that these decisions were made in concert by both the executive head and the governing body.

V. Conclusions

16. The current review of travel policies initiated by the Chief Executives Board for Coordination focused on several specific policy areas, including the factors that determine the class of air travel for missions, the standard for stopovers and rest on arrival, the rules for non-mission travel, whether or not an entity recognizes different types of travel and whether or not an entity provides travel entitlements for Member State representatives. Based on the results, it is clear that very little has changed within the United Nations system in terms of travel policy since the 2004 Joint Inspection Unit report. Travel policies continue to differ across the system, sometimes substantially, but mostly in the area of mission travel. For other categories of travel, the introduction of the lump sum payment options appears to have lessened the differential somewhat, although the basis upon which these payments are made can vary from entity to entity.

Annex I

Standard of air travel for D-2 level staff and below: minimum length of journey for business class

Agency	*Hours*
International Labour Organization (ILO)	7
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)	9
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	8
Universal Postal Union (UPU)	None
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	2.5
United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)	9
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)	7
World Tourism Organization (WTO)	10
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	9
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	9
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	9
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)	9
United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV)	9
United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON)	9
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)	9
Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)	10
Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)	7

Annex II

United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination

Chief Executives Board for Coordination travel policy review[a]

	ILO	FAO	UNESCO	UPU	IFAD	UNIDO	IAEA	WTO	UNDP	UNHCR	UNICEF	UNFPA	UNOV	UNON	ESCWA	OPCW	OSCE
Travel policy decision-making body:																	
Governing body											X		X	X			X
Executive		X		X	X		X			X					X		
Together	X		X			X		X	X			X				X	
For mission travel, does class of air accommodation depend on:																	
Length of journey	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Level of staff	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
For mission travel, does standard allow for:																	
Allow stopovers	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Allow rest on arrival	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Rules differ from mission travel for:																	
Appointment		X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X				X	X
Separation		X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X				X	X
Home leave	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Education	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Change of duty station		X	X			X	X		X			X					X
Entity provides for:																	
Reverse education	X	X	X						X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Medical evacuation	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Security evaluation	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
Rest and recuperation	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X				X
Breastfeeding		X							X		X	X	X				

	ILO	FAO	UNESCO	UPU	IFAD	UNIDO	IAEA	WTO	UNDP	UNHCR	UNICEF	UNFPA	UNOV	UNON	ESCWA	OPCW	OSCE
Single parents									X		X	X	X				
Domestic partners									X	X		X	X	X			X
Travel for representatives of Member States			X		X	X			X	X	X		X	X	X		

[*] See annex I for the full names of entities participating in the review.